



Leading the Marketing Community

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**Task Force on Media and Childhood Obesity
March 21, 2007**

We appreciate the opportunity to be part of this task force. It is critical that all segments of society -- marketers, media, consumer groups, parents, the government -- work together to find real solutions to the childhood obesity challenge.

It's important to keep in mind that the childhood obesity challenge did not develop overnight and will not be solved overnight. We must make real changes in society to address this challenge and that will take some time. There is no magic wand that we can wave to solve this problem.

The marketing community has collectively spent billions of dollars to respond proactively to this challenge. Here are some of the highlights:

Product changes: Food and restaurant companies have responded through product reformulations and new menu options. Thousands of new, healthier products have been introduced and restaurants have reduced portion sizes and developed healthier menu options. Parents have more choices in restaurants and supermarkets than ever before. In fact, one quick-service restaurant is now the largest seller of apples in the country.

Marketing practices: Marketers are changing how and where their products are sold. Last year, the American Beverage Association announced a new agreement with the William J. Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association to reduce the number of calories in beverages sold in the schools. Also, five leading food companies joined with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation to establish voluntary nutrition guidelines for snacks and side items sold in schools that will provide healthier food choices for America's children.

The Ad Council: The Ad Council has partnered with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) since 2004 on obesity prevention PSAs. The "Small Steps" campaign was launched in 2004 and was expanded to target children in 2005. Since the campaign launch, the PSAs have received more than \$270 million in donated media support and the "Small Steps" website attracted an average of 190,000 visits per month during 2006. Just last month, The Ad Council launched a new round of PSAs featuring Shrek characters, urging children to get more exercise. The PSAs can be seen at www.HealthierUS.gov

The Ad Council has also joined with dozens of media, advertising and food companies to form the Coalition for Healthy Children. That group is working to develop consistent, relevant and resonating messages that marketers can all incorporate in their ads to encourage healthier lifestyles.

CARU Guidelines: The marketing community recently completed a comprehensive review of the guidelines of the Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU). That effort, led by Jodie Bernstein, former Director of the FTC Bureau of Competition, gave CARU more power to go after “unfair” advertising and addresses ads in new media and interactive games.

CBBB Initiative: As part of the review of the CARU guidelines, the CBBB also created a new, voluntary initiative designed to shift the mix of advertising messages to children. The 11 companies that are charter members of the Initiative have pledged to devote at least half of their advertising directed to children to promote healthier lifestyles or good nutrition. Participants in the Initiative are Cadbury Schweppes USA; Campbell Soup Company; The Coca-Cola Company; General Mills, Inc.; The Hershey Company; Kellogg Company; Kraft Foods, Inc.; Masterfoods; McDonald’s; Pepsi-Co, Inc.; and Unilever. It has been estimated that these 11 companies represent approximately two-thirds of all children’s food advertising.

The Director of the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative is Elaine Kolish, a nationally-recognized expert on marketing issues and former head of the Division of Enforcement in the Bureau of Consumer Protection at the FTC. Ms. Kolish and Lee Peeler, the President of NARC and former FTC Deputy Director of the FTC’s Bureau of Consumer Protection, will work to see that these companies meet the commitments they have made to shift their advertising messages. More information about the Initiative is available at www.cbba.org/initiative

Media Companies: Media companies are working to be part of the solution. The Cartoon Network has begun a healthy lifestyles initiative using celebrity endorsements. Nickelodeon has begun licensing popular cartoon characters, such as *Sponge Bob Square Pants*, to produce companies to encourage children to eat fruit and vegetables.

In summary, the advertising community has stepped up to the plate in a serious, comprehensive way to fight childhood obesity – in the marketplace, through unprecedented levels of new product development; by extensive expansion of marketing self-regulation; new public service initiatives; and numerous public/private partnerships. Some of these efforts, such as the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative, are just beginning and will take some time to deliver results. But any fair assessment must conclude that these are substantial and important steps to combat the problem of obesity in our country.

We believe, however, that one key segment of society has not yet adequately stepped up to the plate in a serious and substantial way – and that is the government.

Everyone agrees that physical activity is absolutely critical to the health of our children – yet state and local governments across the country have reduced or eliminated physical education in most of our schools. Those same governments often are designing neighborhoods that discourage walking or biking.

At the national level, the federal government has zeroed out the VERB campaign at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). That campaign produced PSAs to encourage children to eat healthy diets and stay active. If the VERB campaign needed to be modified or strengthened, that would be an appropriate goal. But to entirely abandon the VERB campaign at the same time that childhood obesity is on the increase is, frankly, incomprehensible.

In addition, the federal government has not provided adequate funding for preventive efforts to promote healthy eating and physical activity. For example, funding for the CDC's Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity (DNPA) has remained relatively flat for several years, at \$41.5 million. At that level, the CDC can only fund anti-obesity efforts in 28 states. There are no DNPA funds available for 22 other states, including Kansas, or for Mississippi and Louisiana, which have the highest obesity rates in the country.

We are working with a coalition of companies, health groups and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) to convince Congress to provide an FY2008 appropriation of \$65 million for the CDC to promote healthy eating and physical activity. That amount would allow the CDC to fund all of the states in the DNPA program. The federal government needs to accelerate these programs if it is truly to become a leader in this effort to combat childhood obesity.

Senator Brownback has rightly called on all of us to stop pointing fingers at each other and join hands to work together on real solutions. We believe this task force can provide a valuable service by taking a comprehensive look at what's already being done – and then to identify fundamental gaps that still need to be filled. Each of us has an important role to play in this critical effort.

About the ANA

The Association of National Advertisers leads the marketing community by providing its members insights, collaboration and advocacy. ANA's membership includes 380 companies with 8500 brands that collectively spend over \$100 billion in marketing communications and advertising. The ANA strives to communicate marketing best practices, lead industry initiatives, influence industry practices, manage industry affairs and advance, promote and protect all advertisers and marketers. For more information, visit www.ana.net.